

Where are the Feminists?

By Patricia Morgan © 2006

Connie told me, “My friends, including women, don’t like me using the word *feminist*. What happened? Do you hear any women calling themselves feminist anywhere, anymore?”

The August 2005 Women in Psychology newsletter reprinted an article that appeared by Amy Steel of *Fast Forward* called, ***Where’s the women’s movement?*** With the headline, *Feminism has fallen on hard times in Calgary, but activists say there are still battles to be fought in the quest for equality.*

The article pointed out that when feminist leader Gloria Steinem was in Calgary this spring close to a thousand women attended. I was one of them and it was obvious there is interest. Issues still abound like violence against women, disproportionate poverty of women, poor salaries for women dominated professions, low female representation in government and psychological battles with body image, self esteem and assertiveness.

Organizations and groups that lobbied and advocated on behalf of all women in the 1970s and 1980s, except the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), have virtually disappeared. Lack of membership and withdrawal of government funding are cited as the reasons for collapsing. Meanwhile, in some circles to say *feminism* has become politically incorrect.

One of the main reasons the word *feminist* was disparaged was it became connected with a belief that it meant a woman who hated men. Although there are some women, often with abused histories, who developed disgust for men, this is typically not the origin of the feminist movement. Just as there are reasons to dislike the word, there are many meanings. Here are some definitions Note one of the definitions was stated by a man:

- “If being a feminist means equal opportunity, equal salary, and equal fame, then yes, I’m a feminist. But I’m a musician first.” Barbara Harbach, Professor of Music, University of Missouri-St. Louis
- “If being a feminist means noticing these sorts of things, then I became a feminist the day my wife was denied tenure. But what is my responsibility, as a male feminist, beyond merely noticing?” Robert Reich, Professor, Brandeis University
- “If being a feminist means I think women should have the same political, economical, and social rights as men, then I’m definitely a feminist.” Sheila Kay Adams, novelist

If you are interested in the story of Canadian feminism Judy Rebick, former head of NAC, has written ***Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution***. She credits the beginnings of modern feminism to Betty Friedan’s 1963 book ***The Feminine Mystique*** and articles in *Chatelaine* magazine edited by Doris Anderson. Today, although many people believe equality exists, Rebick reminds us that there is much to do. Also consider reading Nancy Millar’s ***The Famous Five*** and my own ***Alberta Women Said: Wise Words by Wondrous Western Women*** and ***She Said: A Tapestry of Women’s Quotes***.

Here is a quote by Ursula Franklin from Rebeck's book, "Feminism isn't an employment agency for women, it's an alternative way of ordering the social space, in which women are the prototype rather than men. It is based on collaboration rather than competitions . . . Seeing the same world through different eyes." It is the courageous woman who cares and who dares to call herself *feminist*. Are you her?

Patricia Morgan is an author, speaker and workshop leader. She helps people develop light hearted strategies for strengthening resilience. She can be reached at 403-242-7796, patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com or www.lightheartedconcepts.com